

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF KETCHERSIDE'S UNITY MOVEMENT

An editorial by Reuel Lemmons in Firm Foundation, June 18, 1963

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This is the third in a series of dealing with elements in Brother Carl Ketcherside's unity proposals which we believe to be out of harmony with the scriptures.

These articles were occasioned by the entire Ketcherside campaign, and were triggered by his special issue of MISSION MESSENGER containing articles submitted by him to the Firm Foundation and rejected by us because they did not answer fundamental objections to parts of his unity proposals. Brother Ketcherside is one of the best writers of our day. He has said many good things about unity. He has justly criticised the decisions (sic) that exist among us. But in all that he has said there has been *absolutely nothing new*, except the points upon which we have taken issue with him. He may have said better than the rest of us the things that have been said before concerning unity, but he has said nothing that has not been said over and over scores of times. It is at the point where he is willing to go beyond what the scriptures teach to extend fellowship and unity to those with whom the scriptures expressly forbids fellowship and unity that we must take issue with him.

We do not present this brief series as an examination of his views. We freely confess that it is too brief, too elemental and too unresearched to pose as a refutation. It simply points out the basic unsoundness of the position.

We are interested in Unity, and we are concerned about fellowship. We fear the censure of the Lord for the division and strife that exists among us. We welcome any attempt to bring the splinters of the Restoration Movement into accord, and welcome even more any attempt to unite the body of Christ—so long as these attempts do not disregard the restriction of Scripture. We believe that those attempts which do disregard the Scriptures will do harm rather than good.

Considered in its entirety the Ketcherside plan is nothing more nor less than the Ecumenical movement of the World Council of Churches boiled down and applied to the church. It has the same weaknesses when applied to the church that it has when applied to the denominations. The Ecumenical movement asks for a loose federation of all denominations in which "they don't ask us to give up anything, and we don't ask them to give up anything." This is exactly the principle Brother K applies to the various sects within the body of Christ. He poses that there be fellowship in spite of differences. He does not answer this question: If differences have destroyed fellowship, how can fellowship exist in spite of them?

The World Council wants to disregard all error among denominations and unite them all. Bro. K wants to disregard error among the sects of the church and unite them all. If it is wrong

for the World Council to disregard error, why is it not wrong to disregard it among the divisions of the Lord's church? If Brother K can accept the error that exists among the sects in the church, why can't he accept the error that exists among the denominations outside the church? Why is error so important regarding how one gets in, but unimportant after one gets in the church? If Bro. K can gloss over errors within the church and say they do not matter, why can we not gloss over errors in the plan of salvation—how one enters the body—and say they do not matter?

His plan, if accepted by all the groups, would reduce the entire church to the low level of the most digressive of all the groups. Such a unity-in-spite-of-differences coalition would never raise the digressive element up; rather it would lower by compromise all the other groups to the level of the most liberal and most digressive of them all. Nor would the lowering process end there. Once having

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accepted the road to compromise the necessity of compromising with still more wild elements that might spring up in the future would be self-evident. The entire restoration plea is surrendered in toto by K's unity plan. It could never be checked without drawing a line somewhere, and Bro. K vows that he will draw no lines.

If by "fellowship without conformity" he means only that he calls "brother" one in error, while he tells him that he is in error concerning the authority of God in areas of silence, then we have always occupied this very same ground. But this is not what he means. He means that he does not believe that instrumental music and other digressive practices are really any more than matters of opinion. In this we do not agree with him. We believe that part of his difficulty springs from former confinement in a small sect which did not even count as a brother those who had obeyed the same gospel. They were not "erring brethren"; they were not even "brethren." This view was never held except by a very small and very opinionated minority. We cannot but believe that in the psychological struggle to throw off this illogical position our brother has, in his haste to get out of Sodom, sped clear through Jerusalem to butt his brains out against the walls of Jericho.

The thing we branded as "liberal" and as a "new doctrine" in Bro. K's teaching is his view that there is no point of doctrine under heaven (save possibly the deity of Jesus) that can be in any way a cause for rupture in "the fellowship." The Bible does not teach it. The "doctrine of Christ" includes more than the doctrine of the deity of Christ, used by John to refute the Gnostics; it includes all Jesus taught and applies to all men to whom the word of God applies. Paul used this principle and would have divided the group ("the fellowship") who contended for circumcision of Gentiles, rather than give up the doctrinal principle. He would have done the same for Peter in Gal. 2. This was over doctrine.

If different doctrines do not destroy fellowship, and if one is a child of God from the moment he is begotten of God (conceived according to K), and if the common fatherhood forces upon us fellowship, then all believers, immersed, sprinkled or unsprinkled, have been

forced into a fellowship from the bonds of which they have no power to extricate themselves. If this is not universalism, its only limits are against complete unbelievers—atheists. We are glad that Brother K will at least draw the line somewhere.

Brother K's appeal is to the "younger preachers," who, he says, urged him to apply for space in the Firm Foundation. It is our observation that those taken in by Ketcherside are the young men. His impractical approach to unity appeals little to men who "by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good from evil." These young men have not lived long enough to know that this is at least the third divisive movement with which the brother has been identified. He has charged off as savior of the brotherhood only to end up in a blind alley at least twice before. When the trilling notes of the Pied Piper sound a host will always be willing to follow. Young preachers need to open their eyes and take a look at where this one is leading them before they blindly follow.